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SOME ASTRONOMY IN THE BOOK OF JOB.

Ch. XXXVIII., 31, 32.

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- 31 *Canst thou bind the sweet influences of Pleiades,
Or loose the bands of Orion?*
32 *Canst thou bring forth Mazzoroth in his season?
Or canst thou guide Arcturus with his sons?*

1. *Pleiades*.—The Hebrew is *Kimah*, a well known group of stars located in the shoulder of Taurus. It is not certain, however, that these are the stars referred to in our passage. The same word occurs in ch. IV., 9, and in Amos v., 8, in which latter instance it is rendered "seven stars" in our King James's Version.

The Vulgate renders the word "Hyades" in Job ix., 9, "Pleiades" in ch. XXXVIII., 31, and "Arcturus" in Amos v., 8. In other ancient versions, and by Jewish commentators, the same word, *Kimah*, is variously rendered. Some render it "Pleiades" in one passage, and "Arcturus" in another, whereas, Arcturus and the Pleiades are not in the same part of the heavens. Others render it *seven stars*, located, however in Aries instead of in the Taurus; while Aben Ezra thinks it designates only a "single star and that a great one," viz., Aldebaran, which he located in the Hyades. The truth is, no one knows to what star, or group of stars, the Divine Speaker referred when he said *Kimah*. That he referred to some star, or stars, it is generally agreed.

Kimah was supposed to have influence on earthly phenomena. As to the kind of influence which it exerted, ancient Jewish opinions differed. One class of Rabbis seem to have attributed to it great cold and the property of retarding vegetation. Another class held just the opposite. It hastens, they say, the ripening of the fruits. According to this view, Job XXXVIII., 31, would mean, "Canst thou bind the fruit which *Kimah* ripeneth?" That is, canst thou restrain its ripening? I can; therefore I am more powerful than thou art. That is a good meaning, for it intensifies the impression of the almightiness of the Divine Speaker and the littleness and weakness of Job by setting them over in antithesis to each other—and that is what he was aiming to do. But he does it, according to this view, by accommodating himself to the supposed popular belief that the stars had an influence on the seasons—or, in other words, that they had something to do

with the weather. The principal evidence we have that such a superstition was prevalent in Job's day is the fact that it exists, to some extent, at the present day in the shape of a sort of weather-moon theory—which could hardly be treated seriously, even in poetry; especially not so on so grand and solemn an occasion as that when the Almighty addressed Job.

The word *Kimah* means a "little crowd," or group. The group of stars which we call Bo-otes, or Hyades, or Pleiades, as the case may be, the Hebrews and cognate nations called the "Little Group;" it is also so called by at least one modern people—the Greenlanders. But a group is something, the members of which are bound together by a real or ideal cord fastened into a knot. Hence the passage may be read, "Canst thou bind the cord which fastens the members of the Little Group together?" "I do it, therefore I am mightier than thou." And perhaps in the mind of the poet, as the Divine Speaker said this he pointed Job to the brilliant star-group in the heavens. "I hold them together." The *Ma'adhabboth* is in this passage rendered "sweet influences" in King James's Version. It is a poetical rendering; it yields a good impression to the reader. But it is vague. What is "the sweet influence" of Pleiades? No one can say, unless he revert to the supposed belief in moon- and star-influence on vegetation, or human life, or something of that kind. The word means a fetter, or cord, fastened into a knot. So say the Septuagint, the Targums, and the Jewish interpreters Rashi and Kimchi; it is also so defined in Fuerst's Hebrew Lexicon, and in Gesenius, Bresslau, Davidson, and others. It is a rare word. It is translated *delicately* in 1 Sam. xv., 32 of the King James's Version, but doubtless it should be *fetters*. "Agag came to him in fetters"—which is very probable under the circumstances, and much more likely to have been the statement of the writer. The construction and the circumstances are different in Lam. iv., 5; the word there comes from a different root and means "sumptuously."

Canst thou bind the cord, or knot, which holds the Pleiades together? Why did our translators say: Canst thou bind the "sweet influences" of the Pleiades? It may be a matter of some interest to revert to the question. Three answers may be given. 1st, They may have taken one Hebrew word for another which resembles it, but which is not identical with it. Or, 2d, they may have regarded the the cord which binds the seven stars together as ideal rather than real or tangible, a "sweet influence," as the influence of attraction, for instance. In this case, the rendering well preserves the poetic beauty of the original. The Pleiades move in harmony with each other,

always preserving their relative position, being bound together by a cord, or sweet influence, which none but an Almighty hand could fasten. Or, 3d, the translators might have been under the influence of the ancient, and to some extent still existing belief, that the stars exerted a power over human destiny. The power, or influence, of the Pleiades was altogether good ; hence the phrase, "sweet influence of the Pleiades." If this view be the true one, and if the translators were true to their own exegesis, it follows that not only did they suppose the stars to have an influence on earthly matters, but that Job was of the same opinion, and that the Almighty appealed to this superstition in his address to Job. A marginal note on the word "Pleiades" in the old Genevan version, made as we know, prior to King James's, reads : Which starres arise when the sun is in Taurus, which is the spring tyme, and brings flowers," which is testimony as to the view held at the time the note was written. A copy of the Cranmer Bible of 1575 in my possession reads, "hynder the sweete influences," etc., which points to the same view.

Of the possible ways of harmonizing the rendering in King James's version with the original, the first above given is the least tenable ; the second, while true to the poetry of the original, is the most astronomical, the most consistent with the dignity, and power, and knowledge, of the Divine Speaker, and at the same time does neither grammatical nor lexical violence to the Hebrew ; the third is the most astrological, having in it, however, a sound astronomical element, but is least consistent with the dignity, etc., of the Divine Speaker.

"Is it *thou* who canst, and doth, bind the cord which holds the Pleiades together?"—a strong way of affirming the negative. "It is I." Hence the impression on Job's mind of the Speaker's almightiness and his own littleness.

2. *Orion*. The Hebrew is *K^esil*. The same word is translated *Orion* in Job IX., 9, and Amos V., 8. In Isaiah XIII., 10, occurring in the plural form, it is translated "constellations."

The word means *a strong one, a hero, a giant*, and, as in the case of *Kimah*, there is nothing in the word itself requiring to designate one group of stars rather than another. The Hebrews, Arabians, Persians and other oriental tribes, it appears, conceived of the group of stars to which was transferred the name *K^esil*, as a giant, or mighty hunter, walking along the heavens. Nimrod, the mighty Babylonian hunter, says an ancient oriental myth, was deified and placed among the stars of heaven. Whether this be the origin of the name of the constellation or not, it at least shows the very early propensity of the Orientals to hero- and nature-worship. The Greeks

borrowed the myth and called the name of the giant hunter Orion. The group of stars, to which the name was transferred, is mentioned by both Hesiod and Homer as early as 900 B. C. ; and by the well-known Greek astronomer, Eudoxus, 366 B. C. ; and 277 B. C. by Aratos the Greek astronomical poet whom St. Paul quotes, and by various others, Ptolemy assigned to it thirty-eight stars—less than half the present number. The Septuagint translators substituted in the Greek Bible the Greek name of the constellation for the Hebrew, which was merely transliterated in our English Bible ; hence the name *Orion* instead of *K'esil*.

The word *Mosh'khoth* also means *bands*, or *fetters*. Some ancient Jewish and some modern Christian commentators think that the Divine Speaker has reference to the influence which Orion was popularly supposed to have on human affairs, particularly on vegetation and the seasons—as in the case of *Kimah*. The rising of Orion shortly after sunset betokens the approach of storms, when vegetable life is bound or restrained by cold. “Canst thou loose the bands of Orion” might in this case mean, “Canst thou loose the restraining influence of winter and cause vegetation to green before the time?”—which implies that the Almighty spake in the astronomical poetry of Job's day.

According to Fuerst, Gesenius, and other Hebrew lexicographers, the idea is, “Canst thou loose the fetters which bind the impious giant Nimrod in the sky?” In which case the Almighty Speaker, for the purpose of making Job realize his own littleness, accommodates his form of expression to a popular myth already current in Job's day. According to a modified form of the same view “the *band* of Orion” is the *girdle* which the astronomers in Job's day already conceived the heavenly giant as wearing about his waist, and to which fancy the Almighty accommodates himself as before.

None of these views, it seems to me, is to be preferred ; not because any violence is done to grammatical or lexical requirements, but because according to none of them would the Almighty be so likely to make on Job's mind the impression which he obviously desired to make. May not “the bands of Orion” rather mean the mysterious attractive influence, or invisible cord, which binds the several stars of the constellation into one group? Canst thou loose or snap this band asunder, causing the stars to fly hither and thither? This seems to me to be the preferable and more striking interpretation. As do the others, it does not imply a playing upon the credulity of Job, which under circumstances so awful would be out of place even in poetry. The only question is, could Job have understood the language of the Almighty in this sense? Perhaps so. Nor does this imply

that Job was well acquainted with the modern doctrine of the attraction of gravitation. With him the attractive influence may have been, and doubtless was, the immediate power of God; in which case he would understand the Almighty's question to mean, "Canst thou hold the stars together, as I do?" The question needed only to be asked in order to impress Job with his own littleness and with the Divine Speaker's almightiness—and that is what was intended to be done.

3. *Mazaroth*. The Hebrew word is the same, being simply transliterated. Its meaning is uncertain. The Vulgate renders it Lucifer, or the Morning Star. The Septuagint avoids an opinion by simply transferring the word as does our King James's version. Rosenmüller, Herder, Umbreit, Gesenius, Noyes, and others, think it means the Zodiac. It is supposed to be identical with *Mazaloth* of 2 Kgs. XXIII., 5, where the Septuagint has *Mazaroth*. The Vulgate agrees that *Mazaloth* means *duodecem signa*, but it does not seem to agree that *Mazaloth* and *Mazaroth* are identical. On the other hand, J. D. Michaelis, on etymological grounds, thinks our word means the Northern and Southern crowns. Fuerst thinks it may designate a special group of stars which was afterwards forgotten; but he inclines rather to the view that the root meaning of the word is *ruler*, and that it here refers to the planet Jupiter, which among the ancients was the supreme god of good fortune. In confirmation of his view he refers to ancient Cilician coins which bear upon their face the words "thy lucky star," in the Hebrew, which word "star" is the singular form of *Mazaroth*. The truth is, no one knows, and at present no one can know, what the word means. The balance of opinion is in favor of "the signs of the Zodiac," and of the identity of *Mazaroth* and *Mazaloth*. It is admitted that a zodiac was known in the astronomy of the most ancient oriental nations.

But in any event, the sense of the expression in which alone this word occurs evidently is, "Canst thou cause that brilliant star, which you see, or that group of stars which you call *Mazaroth*, or all the signs of the Zodiac, to rise just at the moment when they ought to rise? I can." It needed only to ask the question to enable Job to realize the infinite distance between him and the Divine Speaker—and this, again, is what he aimed to do.

4. *Arcturus*. The Hebrew word is *'ayish*. It means simply a group or crowd of stars. What group is meant is not quite certain; nor is it quite certain that the word does not designate a single star. Some Jewish commentators make it mean the "tail of the Pleiades;" Aben Ezra makes it mean the seven stars. The Septuagint renders it *Pleiades*, and the Vulgate, *Arcturus*, the principal star in Bootes.

This latter is the generally accepted designation of the word. "Canst thou guide Arcturus with his sons?" is rendered by Herder and Umbreit, "Canst thou lead forth the Bear with her young?" The pronoun *his* in our English version is *her* in the Hebrew, and to this extent, at least, Herder and Umbreit are right. But the question, whether the Arcturus of the text is the Great Bear, or in the Bear Driver, can not be decided with certainty. "His sons," or rather, "her young," refers to the few smaller stars in the immediate vicinity. The import of the Almighty's question is, "Canst thou cause the group of stars of which Arcturus is the principal one, to move round the Pole everlastingly, never setting? I can; and I do." It needed only, as in the preceding instances, to ask the question to enable Job to realize his own exceeding littleness, and the exceeding almightiness of the Divine Speaker—and that, again, is what he meant to do.